DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 027 576 CG 003 643

By- Almen, R. E.; Joseph, M. P.

An Evaluation of Coupon Incentives.

Minneapolis Public Schools, Minn. Work Opportunity Center.
Pub Date 1 Nov 68
Note- 15p.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.85
Descriptors-Educational Interest, *Incentive Systems, Job Training, *Motivation, Positive Reinforcement, *Student Motivation, Technical Education, *Vocational Training Centers, Youth Opportunities

In October, 1967, the staff of the Work Opportunity Center (WOC) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, began issuing coupons to students for attendance and achievement in classes. Each coupon is worth 10 cents when used toward noon lunches at the WOC cafeteria, dry cleaning services at WOC cleaners, or labor or services charges at the WOC auto service station. This study presents a summary of statistics, a staff evaluation of coupon effectiveness with suggestions for improvement, and a sample of student opinions and suggestions. Attendance improvement was statistically significant, although the majority of staff members felt the coupons to be of little or no help. The response with respect to achievement improvement was similar, but most staff members felt the system should continue. A large majority of students rated the coupons as "important" or "just a little important," and about a third suggested improvements. (BP)

AN EVALUATION OF COUPON INCENTIVES

A Study By

R. E. Almen
Ass't. Director of Research

and

M. P. Joseph, Ph.D.
Director of Research

Work Opportunity Center
107 S.E. Fourth Street
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414

November 1, 1968

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
STAFF INVOLVEMENT	3
IMPROVEMENT IN ATTENDANCE	5
STAFF EVALUATIONS	6
STUDENT EVALUATIONS	10
SUMMARY	12

Tables and Figures

Table 1.	Coupons Redeemed	2
Table 2.	% of Coupons By Issuing Areas	3
Figure 1.	Coupon Redemption by Months	4
Table 3.	Attendance Before and During Coupons	5
Table 4.	Staff Opinions of Coupons (Attendance)	6
Table 5.	Staff Opinions of Coupons (Achievement)	7
Table 6.	Student Opinions of Coupons	10

AN EVALUATION OF COUPON INCENTIVES

Introduction

In October, 1967 the staff of the Work Opportunity Center began issuing coupons to students for attendance and achievement in classes. Each coupon has a monetary value of ten cents when applied in full or part payment of the following goods and services:

- noon lunches in the WOC cafeteria
- dry cleaning services at WOC cleaners
- labor or service charges at WOC's auto service station

Students may accumulate and redeem any number of coupons provided each coupon bears the name of the issuing teacher. Coupons are redeemable only by students during the month issued. They were designed and printed by the graphic arts department using a different color for each month.

The coupon system was intended to serve as an incentive to improve student attendance and/or achievement. It was initiated in all training areas of the Work Opportunity Center one year ago. The project continues to be utilized by all departments.

This study presents a summary of statistics, a staff evaluation of coupon effectiveness with suggestions for improvement, and a sample of student opinions and suggestions.

Statistical Summary

TABLE ONE. COUPONS REDEEMED 10-9-67 THROUGH 10-4-68

Area	Number of Coupons	Cash Value	% of Area Gross Receipts
Food Service	31,805	$3,180.50	46%
Dry Cleaning	6,492	649.20	22%
Service Station	641	64.10	0.5%
TOTALS	38,938	$3,893.80	19.5%

Table one indicates that the most popular student use for coupons was for noon lunches -- 81% of all coupons were redeemed for this purpose. At a cost of 40¢ for a student lunch, this represents a total of 7,950 lunches served at no cash cost to students (actually over 8,000 were served because some students supplemented coupons with a small amount of cash). The number of student meals served daily(averaged over the year) was approximately 40. The total cash value of these coupons amounted to a savings of nearly $3,200 to WOC students for nourishing noon meals.

Seventeen percent of all coupons redeemed were received in the dry cleaning area in payment for clothes cleaning and pressing services. Their value (about $650) amounted to approximately one-fifth of that expended for food and represented 22% of the gross receipts of the drycleaning area.

Students seeking to use coupons in payment for auto services appear relatively few in number. Only two percent of the 39,000 coupons were redeemed for such auto services as tire repair, brake adjustment, carburetor and ignition adjustment, car wash, engine cleaning, and others. These services totalled a value of $64.00 for the year.

The almost 40,000 coupons redeemed represents an investment in student motivation, good health and good grooming habits.

Staff Involvement

Over the year 25 staff members from all areas were involved in issuing coupons for attendance and achievement. The educational areas represented and the number of staff involved are presented in Table Two. The percentages listed in that table show the proportion of the total number of redeemed coupons originating in those areas. (The figures for the total number of coupons issued in each area are not available but not all issued coupons are redeemed). The percentages in Table Two do not differ appreciably from what might be expected. For example, the related and academic staff see more students for generally shorter instructional periods. Thus, their proportion of issuance and redemption is slightly greater per instructor.

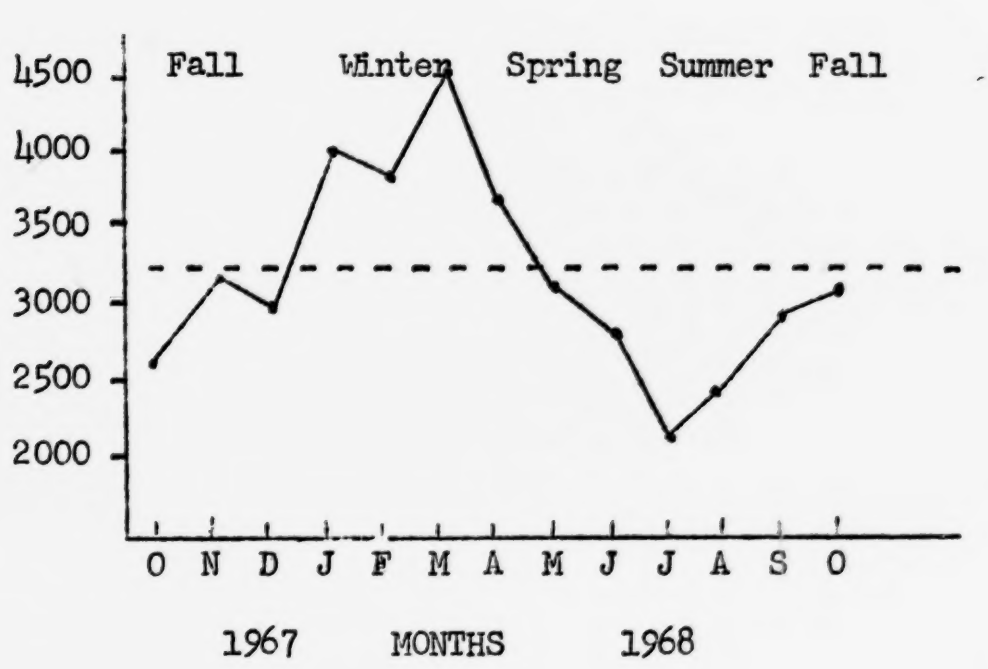
TABLE TWO. % OF REDEEMED COUPONS BY ISSUING AREAS

Issued By:	Number on Staff	% of Redeemed Coupons *
Related and academic staff	6	32%
Technical training staff	14	58%
Orientation, counseling, personal services, & maintenance staff	5	10%
TOTALS	25	100%

* total number of redeemed coupons 38,838.

A graphical analysis of the monthly numbers of coupons redeemed (Figure One) seems to closely follow student enrollment trends. The graph indicates a cyclical pattern over the year. There is a rise in enrollment and attendance during the fall months, a peak reached during February, a decline during the spring dropping to a low point at mid-summer, and then a rise again in early September. Enrollment averaged 240 per month over the year. The redemption rate ranged from a low of approximately 2200 per month during July to a high of 4500 coupons per month in March. This difference is statistically significant from the expected (mean) value. The monthly average redemption rate was $324 in coupons.

Figure One. Coupon Redemption By Months



IMPROVEMENT IN ATTENDANCE

Has the introduction of coupon incentives served to improve attendance? Table 3 shows that the mean attendance percentage during the seven months of 1967 preceding the start of the incentive plan was 37%. However, during the seven corresponding months of 1968 when the plan was in use, the attendance rose to a mean of 49%. The difference between these two means is statistically significant. Caution must be exercised in attributing this improved attendance to the coupon plan alone. Many uncontrolled factors were in operation also during this period. Teachers are continually experimenting with techniques for improving attendance and achievement. These surely have had their effect also. Nevertheless, the coupon incentives plan remains a distinct component of change during this period.

TABLE THREE. ATTENDANCE - BEFORE AND DURING COUPON ISSUANCE

	** Before Coupons	Att.%	During Coupons	Att.%
1	January, 1967	40%	January, 1968	40%
2	February, 1967	37%	February, 1968	50%
3	March, 1967	38%	March, 1968	55%
4	April, 1967	38%	April, 1968	46%
5	May, 1967	37%	May, 1968	48%
6	June, 1967	30%	June, 1968	50%
7	September, 1967	38%	September, 1968	56%
	Mean	37% *	Mean	49% *

* These %'s differ significantly ($P < .01$)

** Coupon incentives started in October, 1967.

STAFF EVALUATION OF COUPON INCENTIVE

Questionnaires were given to all staff involved in the incentives plan in an effort to obtain opinions regarding the effectiveness of the project and suggestions for improvement. Of the 24 who responded, 18 (72%) were using the coupons as an attendance incentive. Asked how coupons were earned for attendance, most indicated they gave one coupon per instructional period (hour or half-hour) although a few gave two per class and a few gave bonuses on Friday or for a full weeks attendance. A number emphasized that coupons were given for productive periods or punctuality. Coupons can be earned also for participation in certain activities such as orientation group meetings, for obtaining physical exam, and for time in a counselor's office. A flexibility among instructors in the extent of rewards was in evidence.

How well have coupons served to boost overall attendance? The staff opinions appear below:

TABLE FOUR. STAFF OPINIONS OF COUPONS (Attendance)

Number of Responses	Response Scale
4	No help in boosting attendance
3	Only a little help in boosting attendance
9	Reasonably successful in boosting attendance
2	A big help in boosting attendance
1	A tremendous boost to attendance
(2)	(No opinion)
(3)	(Stated other opinions or comments)
24	Total

Other opinions or comments regarding coupons as attendance boosters were these:

- very successful with some students, others could care less.
- why mess with success?
- they are helpful in a few cases, most have to be reminded to take a coupon, many refuse them.
- I don't think coupons boost attendance, but they make for a good feeling on the part of students.
- an individual thing. A positive influence on attendance for perhaps 10-20% of my pupils.

Coupons As Achievement Incentives

About 40% of the staff said they use coupons as an achievement incentive in the following ways:

- for work done well, exceptionally well, or for exceptional effort. (6 mentioned this)
- for special tasks not ordinarily assigned. (2 mentioned this)
- given when student seen to need psychological boost.

When asked how well coupons have served to encourage achievement, seven had no opinion but the remaining responded along the scale in these ways:

TABLE 5. STAFF OPINIONS OF COUPONS (Achievement)

Number	Response
3	No encouragement to achievement
4	Only a little encouragement to achievement
6	Reasonably successful in encouraging achievement
1	A big encouragement to achievement
1	A tremendous encouragement to achievement
(7)	(No opinion)
22	Total responding

Other comments and opinions were also received regarding coupons as achievement boosters:

- I use them spontaneously if I feel a student has done well for himself.
- They are some help in selected cases, but overall, I doubt honestly that they are significantly helpful.
- Each student is individualized in the way his achievement is rewarded.
- Encouragement to attend is not necessarily accompanied by a desire to achieve.

Ten of the 24 respondents (40%) had no opinion as to the approximate percentage of students who would cease to come, become poorer attenders, or not change their attendance pattern if coupons were discontinued. Of the 14 who estimated some percentages, the approximate averages were as follows:

5% of students would probably cease to come

15% of students would probably become poorer attenders

80% of students would probably not change attendance patterns

A few isolated incidents of gambling, trading or theft of coupons were noted, but these incidents were rare and usually of a minor nature. Other critical comments cited a lack of clear delineated rules for distribution of coupons and lack of consistency from area to area. One comment stated that a few staff members were showing favoritism or were being manipulated by certain students to obtain a greater share.

Only one staff person felt that coupons should be discontinued, but 15 (63%) responded that the system should continue to operate as it presently does. The remaining 8 (33%) suggested these modifications:

1. Within reason, allow teacher to distribute coupons as he sees fit.

2. Have "bank" so students could save large numbers of coupons. Have a store with goods for exchange (like "stamps" redemption centers).
3. Set no time limit - have one color coupon good all the time. Print in larger denominations (up to 25¢ perhaps). Make coupons redeemable for actual cash, keep records, limit to a certain amount per month perhaps. Get suggestions from students.
4. Perhaps should be handed out with greater care.
5. Staff should be consistent in way coupons are given out. Coupons for attendance should be 1 coupon per ½ hour attended. Reduce value to 5¢.
6. Earn coupons by work accomplished only.
7. Establish uniformity.
8. Add a "weekly bonus" of 3-5 coupons if attended all week. Plus 3 more if student can cite his progress for the week. Nurse should issue coupons if health steps taken. Give to student council members at meeting.
9. Use coupons for unprompted courteous acts — hand out 5-10 coupons in envelope which has printed upon it "for that act of kindness remembered by WOC in this small way." Have a few envelopes in hands of all staff.

Finally, the staff offered these further critical comments and suggestions:

1. Coupons seem to have little effect on anything.
2. Provide a free student lunch to all and be done with it.
3. Students expect coupons, ask for them when instructor forgets.
4. Coupons are a vital incentive to most, others do not bother about them. Needy students are most concerned -- use them for lunch.

5. I feel this is a legitimate and "face-saving" method to assure food and other services to students who have need of them. Relieves a small amount of pressure to leave school.
6. Increase real value to student by allowing purchase of gas with coupons. Coupons have been the one item students ask about.
7. My students have very different incentives: credits, the contribution they are making and the emotional rewards linked with it. For some students, coupons come in handy at times.
8. The diet (and, hence, attendance) of about 30% would suffer if coupons were discontinued. Attendance is as good a basis as any to distribute coupons.
9. Many depend on coupons for lunch and dry cleaning needs.
10. I have never used them to encourage attendance. I give them to enable students to have a good meal, or get clothes cleaned -- to promote health and cleanliness.

STUDENT EVALUATION OF COUPON INCENTIVES

Fifty students were randomly surveyed by student interviewers. In answer to the question, "How important are coupons to you?" the following results were obtained on a four-step scale:

TABLE SIX. STUDENT OPINIONS OF COUPONS

Response	Girls	Boys	Total
1. Not important at all to me	1	3	4 (8%)
2. Just a little important	10	9	19 (38%)
3. Important	4	12	16 (32%)
4. Very, very important	5	6	11 (22%)
TOTALS	20	30	50 (100%)

Essentially equal numbers responded (for a total of 70% of the group) that coupons were either "important" or "just a little important". A greater proportion felt them "very, very important" than "not important at all."

When asked "why are coupons important to you?" the majority responded to the effect that pocket money was meager and that coupons enabled them to get lunches and/or dry cleaning services which they otherwise could not afford. Fifteen percent indicated that they seldom used coupons if at all. Other interesting student comments received were these:

- As far as the gas station is concerned they are no good.
- I'd come even without coupons.
- Drycleaning service saves me a lot of handwashing.
- I don't have much cash, they take the place of money.
- About the only time I eat til payday.

The coupon system was judged as being "fair to students" by all 50 of the interviewees. About a third said it was not perfect but were satisfied with it. These responses seem to sum up the feelings: "You get about as many as you deserve; it's good because you can earn in one morning for lunch; it's a pretty good reward."

Improvements were suggested by about one-third of the respondents. Sixty percent of their suggestions stated that more coupons should be given. Other modifications mentioned were these:

- make more items available.
- give extra coupons when you do a good job.
- have 5¢ coupons, too.
- double coupons when you work hard.

There was a feeling among a number of those interviewed that coupon value to students would be enhanced if they were able to buy a larger variety of goods and services with them. About 80% made suggestions as to what they would like made available. Forty percent of these suggestions mentioned cigarettes, pop, candy bars or gum (in that order of importance). These are indicative of the immediate, short-term gratification needs that characterizes many WOC students. On the other hand 26% of the responses were for staples such as clothing, shoes, and cosmetics. Boys frequently mentioned car parts or tools (9% of all responses). A number of other thoughtful suggestions offered for coupon use included these?

- for a bus ride here and back.
- for shop or art materials, notebooks, paper, pens, etc.
- for nurse's aide uniforms.
- for gas and oil.
- for recreation - use of pool table or ping-pong table.
- for cash (5¢ per coupon was suggested).

SUMMARY

During the first year of the coupon incentive system, goods and services valued at $3,894 were purchased in the school cafeteria, drycleaning plant and auto service station. Students earned them for class attendance and achievement. Eighty-one percent of the 38,938 coupons, each worth 10¢ in payment, were redeemed for noon lunches, 17% for drycleaning services, and 2% for auto repair and service charges.

Twenty-five staff members were involved in issuing coupons to a total

average WOC enrollment of 240 students whose average attendance rate was 37% before and 49% after the plan was introduced. This improvement in attendance is statistically significant. Coupons were a contributing factor in this improvement. February and July were the high and low redemption months totalling approximately $450 and $220 respectively.

As an attendance booster, 80% of the staff rated coupons along a 5-point scale ranging from "no help" to "a tremendous boost." Although 47% felt that the plan was reasonably successful, more felt coupons had been of no help or a little help than felt coupons had been a big help or a tremendous boost. This same trend was seen among staff opinions of coupons as achievement incentives. About 60% of the staff feel that the system should continue to function and a third suggested some modifications for consideration.

A sample of 50 students also critically evaluated the coupons in interviews made by students themselves. Eight percent said coupons were not important to them and, at the other extreme, 22% said coupons were very, very important. The remaining 70% were almost equally divided in their judgements as whether coupons were "important" or "just a little important."

All of the 50 respondents judged the system as "fair to students" but about a third suggested improvements. The majority of these stated that more coupons should be given or that more items should be made available for coupon use. Some thoughtful suggestions as to what they would like to have included were made by the respondents.